**Case Study**

*This is a snapshot into the world of Martha Washington, a ten-year veteran teacher at Independence Middle School. Ms. Washington is the PLC chair for the 7th grade team and serves on the Leadership Team. She also sponsors an after-school knitting club.*

When Ms. Washington, a seventh-grade English/Language Arts teacher, received her class list at the beginning of the semester she was very excited. She discovered wonderfully diverse classes in all of her sections. It seemed that each class was equally comprised of students with varying abilities and interests. From the 25 students in her third period class, six of her students are ESL, five are exceptional and three students are repeating the class due to excessive absences and poor performances.

A few weeks after the beginning of the school year, Ms. Washington found that the diverse range of reading abilities among her students was posing an extra challenge for her. Some of her students were having problems with reading assignments and they could not complete the reading questions that she assigned after each chapter. She decided to introduce new activities to scaffold the learning of the students and to assist them with their reading assignments. These activities included front-loading vocabulary and posing questions at the beginning of each chapter that students would be responsible for answering at the end of the chapter. She also used the “GIST” strategy that she had learned about in a SIOP training. This strategy really helped her students identify the most important elements in each lesson and seemed to help them summarize succinctly. Things seemed to be looking up. Ms. Washington had heard from a colleague that revisiting key questions throughout a unit was a good way to inform her instruction. She tried this strategy as well and posted key questions in the front of the room and revisited the questions often through exit tickets and daily classroom discussion. More students were demonstrating through their comments that they were learning more than before she had implemented the changes.

Even though Ms. Washington’s choices seem to make a difference, many of the students’ grades still did not reflect the improvements they were making in class discussions and engagement. To respond to this concern, Ms. Washington made the decision to differentiate her instruction based on a workshop all the teachers attended at the beginning of the year on developing student profiles to make data-driven decision. First, she developed student learning profiles for each student, using the method shared in the workshop. After assessing the students, she decided to group the students based on their ability levels. Ms. Washington did not inform the students about the basis for their groupings.

Over the next several weeks, she observed that students in the lower ability groups were often finished with their less-challenging work long before students in the higher ability groups who were often asked to justify their answers, compare and contrast, and analyze cause and effects. Lower ability students began to act out while the students in the high ability group became non-cooperative and unwilling to work with students outside of their ability group. Classroom discipline became more challenging, and the students began to be disrespectful to each other. Ms. Washington also overheard students making comments such as, “We are in the dumb group because we don't know how to do this stuff.” She also heard students in other groups making comments such as, “We are the smart ones, and our work is harder. That’s not fair!” Ms. Washington knew that ignoring these comments would not solve this problem, so she tried talking to a few students in the hallway or after school to assure them that she had a plan for each of them to help them achieve their greatest potential. It did not seem that her comments to individual students changed student behavior. However, Ms. Washington felt confident that students needed to demonstrate mastery of basic skills and knowledge before they could be exposed to more difficult problems that they might not be able to handle successfully.

Ms. Washington also noticed that the learning groups reflected the socioeconomic differences among the students’ families and that the students from working class backgrounds comprised the lower ability group. She knew there had to be a better way to help her students be successful, and she was determined to resolve the problem. Ms. Washington then went to her colleague Ms. Jones who seemed to really have a handle on how to group and regroup students in her class each day. Like Ms. Washington, Ms. Jones had mixed ability classes with students who ranged from those who are highly gifted to those with disabilities in reading and novice English speakers. The two teachers then began to talk about differentiation and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of heterogeneous grouping. Ms. Washington decided that at the beginning of the next quarter in three weeks, she would introduce some of the groupings she had discussed with Ms. Jones.

One of the professional development opportunities that Ms. Washington has been most excited about this year is her ongoing monthly instructional technology workshops that the she signed up to complete with about 30% of the faculty. Ms. Keener, the facilitator, has shared some wonderful tools with teachers each month and has given each teacher time to explore the tools and to discuss ways that the tools could be used most effectively in class. Ms. Washington really likes the lessons she has created and has received positive feedback and a few good suggestions from Ms. Keener about how she can improve the lessons. Ms. Washington thinks the Web 2.0 tools will help her students be more engaged, but she is afraid that they will not know how to behave if they are working in groups and with computers or that she will forget all the nuances of the resources since she has only used these websites and tools a few times in a controlled environment with Ms. Keener. She might use some of these lesson ideas next quarter after she regroups her students but she is very nervous about using them. Will the students behave? Will they be off-task? Will they ruin the computers? Will they Google inappropriate things? Maybe at next month’s meeting, she will learn about a tool that she can use right away.

*Assume you are the principal of this school. Using the NC Educator Evaluation Summary Sheet, what would you recommend that Ms. Washington add to her Professional Development Plan?*